

**The news coverage of the 2004 European elections in the new member states:  
The cases of the Czech Republic and Slovakia<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the EU news coverage in the press and on television in the weeks leading to the 2004 European elections in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, shortly after they joined the EU. The study uses the European Election Study data, and most results follow previous research. The EU news coverage was generally low and focused on national rather than EU actors. It was more visible on television than in newspapers and more visible on public television and in broadsheets than on private television and in tabloids. On the contrary to previous findings, the EU news coverage was lower in the two new member states than in the whole EU. Polarized opinion about the EU among Czech political elites was expected to increase the EU news coverage there, yet the pro-European Slovakia has higher coverage. The findings are discussed in the light of the literature on EU news coverage.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a shortened version of my MA dissertation written at the University of Exeter under the supervision of Susan Banducci, submitted in September 2009

## INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) is a great political entity that needs an effective political communication to function properly and legitimately. Most of the communication that the EU produces serves, however, only elites because its content, language, and accessibility can be very complicated and hard to understand for an ordinary citizen (Peter 2003: 23; Schlesinger 1999: 264). On a national level, EU communication usually originates from national political elites and often concentrates rather on domestic than EU-wide issues. Political communication between EU institutions and the public is one of the main substances of the democratic EU, and media are the tool to make such a communication happen. Media play a very important role in democratic political process and especially during election campaigns.

The study of media coverage of an event such as the European election matters because media are the most important source for Europeans to get their information about the EU (Eurobarometer 62). Availability of information is necessary for a quality decision making for both public and policy makers; for the public to vote for those really representing their views and for policy makers to respond to people's needs (Norris 2004: 117). Considering they are a part of the EU decision making, European citizens should want to and be able to gain as much knowledge about the EU as possible to be able to make an educated and reasonable choice when electing their country's representatives to the European Parliament (EP). It is believed that "the EP election represent an international equivalent to the national referenda on the EC in each member state" (Eichenberg & Dalton 1993: 515) as the turnout and election outcome show how people feel about the EU.

Media also play a role in embracing a country's democracy, and many researchers have agreed that media have positive impact on "democratization and human development" (Norris 2004: 115-116). To strengthen democracy, media need to provide plurality of opinions, serve as a watchdog for the government and a place for public debate, and to be "free and independent of established interests" and easily accessible to wide public (Norris 2004: 124-125). Additionally, an effective legal framework ensuring and protecting diversity of media and opinions in the media is required for media to fulfil their democratic function (Mughan & Gunther 2000: 4-5).

This study examines the media coverage of the news about the EU in newspapers and on television in the weeks leading to the 2004 European election in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. These two countries both became members of the EU on 1 May 2004. Therefore, the European election held on 11 and 12 June in the Czech Republic and on 13 June in Slovakia followed very closely and was the first chance for the new EU citizens to participate

and exercise their newly attained rights. The turnout suggested, however, that Czech and Slovak public were not interested in taking the full advantage of their new rights as European citizens as the turnout was very low in both countries. The average EU turnout was 45.47 percent but 28.32 percent of eligible voters came to the polls in the Czech Republic and only 16.97 percent in Slovakia. Slovakia's turnout was the lowest among all, then, 25 member states as well as in the whole history of the European Election since 1979 (European Parliament 2009; Gyarfasova 2007: 374-375).

The Czech Republic and Slovakia present a good case for a cross-national comparison. They were once a single country and both were under the Communist regime, so one would expect similar views on the EU from the public and from the political elites. On the other hand, it was the very differences in political attitudes and governing styles that had led to the peaceful split of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Even today, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are on two different paths through the EU. Thus, there are variations in the public opinion about the EU and in attitudes of the political elites in the two countries, and these reflect in the EU news coverage.

This paper starts with a review of literature on the importance of the study of news coverage, the aspects of media coverage, and the second-order election theory. Then, research questions along with research design are presented. To help explain the media coverage, the paper also briefly outlines political developments and characteristics of media systems in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Finally, results of data analysis are discussed followed by concluding remarks.

## **IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

There is a variety of literature on research of media coverage of EU issues and its effects on public opinion on issues such as European integration, EU enlargement, Euro, or the benefits and effectivity of the EU in general. The EU realizes that it is not able to inform European citizens about its processes and policies by itself (Anderson & McLeod 2004; Meyer 1999; Morgan 1995), so it “relies on the media to indirectly strengthen its legitimacy by increasing citizen’s awareness of its activities and policies” (De Vreese et al. 2005: 185). Media can help increase not only public’s knowledge about but also its interest in the EU, and they can also contribute to the formation of a common European identity (De Vreese & Semetko 2004; De Vreese et al. 2006).

Research about the EU media coverage is necessary for the knowledge about and functioning of democratic processes in the EU and for the discussion about EU’s

communication and democratic deficits (De Vreese et al. 2005 and 2006: 478). It is important that citizens are informed because then they can make thought-through decision in the European election and thus participate in EU policy making. Despite the fact that the European election are the only time when citizens can directly influence the EU politics and choose their national representation (Karp et al. 2003: 272), European citizens seem not be interested in taking an advantage of it which is shown by declining turnout in the European election (Eichenberg & Dalton 1993: 512).

Voting is the central element of democratic political systems. The EU is a democratic entity, so a high turnout in European elections is a prerequisite for well-functioning democracy in the EU (De Vreese et al. 2006: 478). Therefore, high visibility of EU news in the media is desirable considering media are very important source of information for the public (De Vreese et al. 2006; Mughan & Gunther 2000: 3; Norris 2000; Peter 2003: 2; Prior 2005: 579). Higher voter turnout is induced when benefits of voting outweigh its costs. This can be influenced by access to information and since voters get most of their information from mass media and during campaigns, the extent of media and campaigning regulations and limitations can in the end influence the turnout (Baek 2009: 376-377).

## **ASPECTS OF MEDIA COVERAGE**

Although media are such an important source of information (De Vreese & Boomgaarden 2006a: 421), they are often blamed for the lack of EU news and for creating communications deficit, which along with other factors then leads to democratic deficit of the EU (De Vreese 2007; Norris 2000). Most of the studies agree that the coverage of EU issues in the news is generally very low (De Vreese et al. 2005; Machill et al. 2006) and only peaks around important events such as European elections, referenda on various EU issues or the introduction of Euro into a country (De Vreese et al. 2006; Peter 2003: 6; Peter & de Vreese 2004: 5; Semetko et al. 2000). Some studies cover only the visibility of EU news (De Vreese et al. 2005), while others study their tone (Bruter 2004; De Vreese & Semetko 2002) or prominence (Peter et al. 2003, 2004; Peter & de Vreese 2004). Although the EU is not covered much in the news, when it is covered, it is with high prominence (Peter & de Vreese 2004: 16) and mostly with neutral (Peter et al. 2003) or negative tone (De Vreese et al. 2006; De Vreese & Semetko 2002). The news about Europe also differ in their “European nature” which is the extent to which the EU is covered as a pure European issue or in connection to national issues and actors, with the second type prevailing (De Vreese et al. 2005 and 2006; Peter et al. 2004; Semetko et al. 2000; Trenz 2004).

Studies of the EU news coverage often compare the coverage among outlets. The coverage is usually similar in both print news and on television, but sometimes, newspapers are found to have more EU news (De Vreese et al. 2006) while television is believed to have stronger impact on the public (Peter et al. 2003). Furthermore, public television has more stories about the EU than private television (De Vreese et al. 2006; Peter et al. 2003; Peter 2003), and similarly, serious newspapers (broadsheets) have higher EU coverage than tabloids (Blumler 1997; Peter & de Vreese 2004; De Vreese et al. 2006).

When comparing media coverage between years or countries, studies also consider political and economic context (Semetko et al. 2000; De Vreese et al. 2006) along with media systems (Peter et al. 2003) and country-specific journalistic cultures (De Vreese et al. 2006; De Vreese et al. 2001; Semetko et al. 2000; Trenz 2004). The EU news coverage varies greatly among countries (De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006; Peter et al. 2004; Semetko et al. 2000) and knowing the countries' background and history helps better understand the extent of and variations in media coverage among them (Linek & Lyons 2007; Peter 2003: 27). The Czech Republic and Slovakia are very good cases for comparison as they share a similar political structure and have a common history, yet they vary in a number of important aspects (Linek & Lyons 2007: 329).

European election presents a special case as it is a "second-order national election" (De Vreese et al. 2006; Reif & Schmitt 1980). Generally, there is "less at stake" in second-order election and some aspects result directly from it: the low voter turnout, low news coverage, and (relatively) low interest in campaigning from politicians (as compared to national election) (Reif & Schmitt 1980: 9). When attention is paid to the European election in the news, it is usually in connection with national political leaders, parties or national issues, while the EU issues are often pushed to the side (Reif & Schmitt 1980: 13). There are opposing views on what happens when second-order election take place for the first time, such as it was in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 2004. Either there is too much unknown and too many questions and doubts from the public, politicians and journalists, which results in low turnout and low media coverage (Reif & Schmitt 1980: 11) or a "first election boost" occurs causing high turnout and a visible media coverage (Franklin 2007: 56).

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

Drawing upon existing research and previous empirical studies, I formulated a set of research questions and hypotheses.

RQ1: How visible is the news about the EU compared to other political news? Does this vary by country and outlet?

RQ2: How visible is the news about the European election compared to other political news? Does this vary by country and outlet?

I expect the visibility of EU news to be generally low compared to other political news (De Vreese et al. 2005; De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006; Peter et al. 2004; Semetko et al. 2000), but at the same time I anticipate the EU coverage to be higher in the Czech Republic and Slovakia than the average is in the EU considering they are both new member states and both held the European election for the first time which should bring about higher news coverage (De Vreese et al. 2005; Franklin 2007). Based on study of De Vreese et al. 2006, I expect the visibility of both EU news and news about the European election and the campaign to be more visible in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic. I assume such distinction also because Slovakia is more pro-European than the Czech Republic. At the same time, the fact that the debate about the EU and the country's place there is more common and evident in the Czech Republic than in Slovakia (Gyarfasova 2007: 372, 388; 2003; Hanley 2003) it may increase the news coverage there (Peter & de Vreese 2004). I expect to see higher EU coverage on the public television newscasts than in the private television (De Vreese et al. 2006; Peter et al. 2003) and, similarly, higher visibility of EU news in the broadsheets than in tabloids (Blumler 1997; De Vreese et al. 2006; Peter & de Vreese 2004). I also expect the visibility of EU news to increase closer to the election (De Vreese et al. 2006; Semetko et al. 2000).

*H1: The news coverage of EU matters will have only a small proportion relative to all political and business news. It will be higher in Slovakia, in broadsheets, and on public television.*

*H2: The news coverage of European election and the campaign will have only a small proportion relative to all political and business news but will be higher than the coverage of EU news. It will be higher in Slovakia, in broadsheets, and on public television.*

RQ3: How prominent are the EU news? Does this vary by outlet?

Although the visibility of the EU news is low, I expect the Czech and Slovak media to report prominently about the EU, to place the EU news on the front page of the newspapers and among the first five stories on television broadcast (Peter & de Vreese 2004: 16). I also expect the EU news to be more prominent in the newspapers than on television.

*H3: The prominence of the EU news will be high in both Czech and Slovak media. The prominence of the EU news will be higher in newspapers than on television.*

RQ4: Is the news European-focused?

I expect the EU news coverage to be nationally-focused rather than reporting on events only from the EU-level point of view (De Vreese et al. 2005; Peter et al. 2004; Semetko et al. 2000; Trenz 2004). I expect the most EU news to be about national events, issues and policies and to take place in the respective countries. I also expect that more attention in the news will be paid to domestic actors and to each country's own MEP candidates.

*H4: The EU news coverage will not be European-focused. It will mostly cover domestic events and issues and will involve mainly domestic political actors.*

RQ5: What is the tone of EU coverage?

I anticipate the EU coverage in the Czech Republic and Slovakia to be mostly neutral or negative (De Vreese et al. 2006; De Vreese & Semetko 2002; Peter et al. 2003). News with some tone and evaluation of the EU may be more frequent in the Czech Republic and Slovakia than in other EU countries as it is the style of journalists in the post-Communist countries to give their opinion on issues they write about (Jakubowicz 2001).

*H5: The news about the EU is mostly neutral and when it contains evaluation of the EU, it is mostly negative.*

## **DATA, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

This paper utilizes quantitative data analysis and cross tabulation. It uses data from an EU wide content analysis of the news media coverage leading up to the 2004 European election. The study covered main national evening news broadcasts of the most widely watched public and private television stations and three most read newspapers in 23 countries (all 25 EU member states, except Cyprus and Luxembourg) (De Vreese et al. 2005: 182). I use data from the Czech Republic and Slovakia and examine only several variables. Two most popular broadsheet newspapers and one tabloid newspaper were collected in the Czech Republic (Mladá Fronta, Právo, and Blesk) and in Slovakia (Nový Čas, Pravda, and Sme/Práca) three weeks leading to the election. Two television newscasts – main evening news – one on a private channel and one on a public channel (Czech TV Nova and Česká Televize and Slovak STV 1 and Markiza) were recorded two weeks leading to the election. In

total, 1753 stories were coded for all the outlets examined in the two countries. These media were then coded for about 50 variables using a codebook developed for this study. In newspapers, all stories on the front page, one randomly selected page and all stories containing some information about the EU were coded in the political/news, editorial and business sections of the newspapers. Television news shows were coded entirely (European Election Study 2004: Codebook, 2005).

Unit of analysis was the individual news story “defined as a change of topic, typically introduced by the anchor person” (European Election Study 2004: Codebook, 2005; De Vreese et al. 2005: 182). Certain variables, such as media outlets, topics, locations, and actors were coded using separate appendices. The coders carrying out the analysis were mostly native speakers of the different languages and were carefully and extensively trained with the codebook by qualified trainers. Furthermore, coders were monitored “and inter-coder reliability tests were conducted. The results of these tests were generally in the 80–90% range of agreement for specific topic codes and thus higher for the more ‘general level’ categories reported here” (De Vreese et al. 2005: 182).

Research questions one and two examine the visibility of news about the EU and European election and are based on the topic variable that examines the “major subject of the story” or the subject that is “taking the most space or time” (European Election Study 2004 Codebook). Coders chose a topic from an extensive topic list. The “EU news” in this study means stories that were assigned a code expressing any EU topic (including European election). The first two research questions distinguish between visibility of the EU news (including the news about European election) and the news about the European election (marked as “EP news” in the tables and figures) to see what is the share of news about the European election considering the sample was collected in the weeks leading to the European election. For this study, the EU news is defined by Peter & de Vreese (2004: 5) as the “coverage that addresses EU policies and politics, EU institutions and politicians, or events at the EU level”.

This paper distinguishes between visibility and prominence of the EU news: visibility measures how often an EU news story appears among other political news, while prominence, which is examined in the third question, is the importance that is given to the EU news measured by the placement of the story in the newspaper or news broadcast (page number and order of appearance, respectively). Research question four studies the extent of European nature in the EU news. By using two variables, location and actor of a story, the question examines whether EU news discusses EU-level events, issues and policies or rather domestic



level happenings. Research question five aims to assess the tone of EU news by utilizing the variable asking about both explicit and implicit evaluation of the EU (European Election Study 2004 Codebook). When coders decided that a story contained evaluation of the EU, they were then further required to mark whether evaluation of the EU was positive, rather positive, ambivalent, rather negative, or negative (European Election Study 2004 Codebook).

## **THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA**

The two parts of Czechoslovakia had different views on the future after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989: the Czech elites aimed to fulfil their economic interests and gain economic success in connection with the West, while the Slovaks aspired for “identity, recognition and nationalist ideology” and recognition by the West (Rupnik 2000: 5). Both countries’ main goal was to become member of the EU and they both realized that it might be easier to achieve if they were separate. The split made the countries look as two well-organized and politically stable nations, and by 1994, both countries were the first post-Communist countries on a way toward the EU accession process (Handl 2001: 1; Gould 1999: 1). In 1997, however, Slovakia was not invited to the first round of accession negotiations for not fulfilling the democratic criterion for accession due to its poor political situation caused by the authoritarian government of Vladimír Mečiar between 1994 and 1998 (Brusis 2005: 294-295; Gould 1999: 1), but Slovakia was back on track to the EU accession in 1999 under the government of Mikuláš Dzurinda (Freedomhouse.org).

The post-Communist countries have generally a strong desire to join the EU as it means a warranty to gaining and maintaining democratic status (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005: 1; Cichowski 2000:7-8). The CEE countries also received a generous financial support from the EU through the pre-accession funds (European Commission 2009). Despite all the benefits of the EU membership, “the issue of sovereignty remains sensitive in the countries which have re-established their sovereignty only a decade ago” (Albi 2002: 1; Rupnik 2000: 19). The public in the CEE countries was often rather sceptical about joining the EU as opposed to the optimistic countries’ elites (Albi 2002: 11-12). In the Czech Republic, 46 percent of population believed the membership in the EU was a good thing while 13 percent thought it was a bad thing. In Slovakia, 59 percent saw the EU membership as a good thing and only five percent considered it a bad thing (Eurobarometer 2003.3). Moreover, some Czech politicians expressed what many people had felt: doubts that the Czech Republic would not be treated in the EU equally because it is a smaller and less

economically developed state than, for example, France or Germany (Krok-Paszowska & Zielonka 2000: 13; Perron 2000: 18-19).

## **MEDIA IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA**

Media in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as in all post-Communist countries have undergone a huge change from the state-owned, state-financed, and state-controlled media to relatively liberal and free media market with foreign media owners and money gained from advertisers (Čulík 2004: 31-32). Larger media market brought also commercialization which resulted in prioritizing profit-making at the expense of quality of the media output and its 'democratic functions' and creation of tabloids (Gulyás 2003: 82-84; Mughan & Gunther 2000: 7). The most read daily newspapers in the Czech Republic and Slovakia are both tabloids, *Blesk* and *Nový Čas* (Čulík 2004: 38; Gulyás 2003: 84-85; Školkay 2004:206). Apart from their interest in sensational news, journalists in the CEE see themselves as active advocates of their political views and want to influence both the political scene and the public (Jakubowicz 2001: 75).

Legal framework is necessary for the functioning of free media, and "the guarantee of freedom of expression and information is regarded as a basic human right" in many legal documents (Norris 2004: 117). There exist legal guarantees for media autonomy in the constitutions and press acts of post-Communist countries, but there is no clear media policy and only lenient laws regulating media content exists. The autonomy of media is also "weakened by inadequate respect for the law and the strong impact of political and economic actors on the media" as well as by commercializing media, competition, technology and international influences (Jakubowicz 2001: 73-74; Školkay 2004: 205). Media regulations in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia are often considered weak and "often accused of political bias" (Čulík 2004: 38). Foreign owners exploit the media markets for profit and do not mind politicians interfering in television programming or press output (Čulík 2004: 38; Školkay 2004: 210). Public media are under financial influence from the government, relying on its funding, as well as under political influence as many broadcasting council members are politicians. Private media, on the other hand, are free from political influence but are affected by owners and advertisers (Freedomhouse 2008: *Freedom of the Press*).

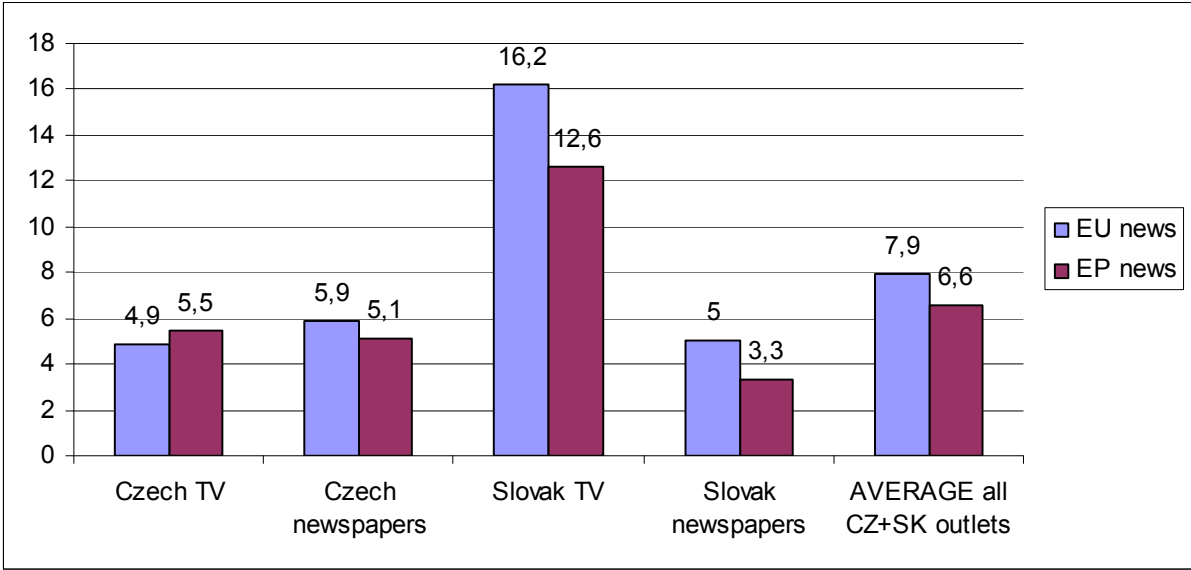
## **DATA ANALYSIS: VISIBILITY OF THE EU NEWS**

First two research questions address the visibility of EU news and news about the European election in media in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The visibility of EU news in

the Czech and Slovakia in the weeks leading to the European election was 7.9%, with the news about the European election and campaign making up 6.6% (see figure 1). This was lower than the average EU news coverage across the 25 EU member states (9.8%) and also lower than the average in the new member states (10.4%) (De Vreese et al. 2006: 487). These results confirm the hypothesis that the EU news coverage is generally low but do not confirm the part that the Czech and Slovak EU news coverage should be higher than the average European coverage.

Czech newspapers and television along with Slovak newspapers showed similar amount of visibility of EU news (around 5%), only the Slovak television showed the largest deviation with the average peaking to 16.2%. This complies with previous findings about EU news coverage to be more visible on television. However, the Czech television then contradicts these findings as the visibility of EU news there is lower than in Czech newspapers (4.9% compared to 5.9% for the EU news in the Czech newspapers). Additionally, the Czech television is the only medium (looking at the average of both public and private television) that shows slightly higher visibility of news about the European election (5.5%) compared to EU news about (4.9%). In Slovakia, EU news coverage was more visible on television (16.2%) than in newspapers (5%), while in the Czech Republic, the newspapers (5.9%) had more EU news than the television (4.9%). According to the Pearson Chi-square test, these results are statistically significant.

**Figure 1: VISIBILITY OF EU NEWS AND NEWS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN ELECTION (%)**



\* Pearson Chi-square ,000

As expected, the lowest EU coverage was found in the tabloids (only 1.5%; this is however a number only for the Czech tabloid *Právo* because there was no EU story in the Slovak tabloid *Nový Čas*) while the public television showed the highest coverage (11.4% as an average of both Czech and Slovak public television; see figure 2). The difference between public and private television (1.2%) is, however, not as large as the difference between broadsheets and tabloids (5.2%). These results are in accordance with previous research on the difference in EU coverage between different types of media. According to the Pearson Chi-square test, these associations are statistically significant.

**Figure 2: VISIBILITY OF EU NEWS AND NEWS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN ELECTION**  
(%): Comparison of outlets

	<b>Public TV</b>	<b>Private TV</b>	<b>Broadsheets</b>	<b>Tabloids</b>
<b>EU news</b>	11,4	9,2	6,7	1,5
<b>EP news</b>	10,7	7,1	5,4	1

\* Pearson Chi-square ,000

There was a large difference between the EU news coverage in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. As expected, the coverage was twice as much higher in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic (11% and 5.4%, respectively; see figure 3) despite the fact that there was no visible debate about the EU in Slovakia, while in the Czech Republic the conflict was apparent among political parties and politicians as well as within the parties themselves. This may indicate that in the post-Communist countries, presence of political conflict does not increase the news coverage. The numbers also show that the majority of EU news in the Czech Republic was about the election (5.3% as compared to 5.4% for all the EU news).

It is interesting to evaluate the turnout at the European election with relevance to the EU news coverage. Slovakia's turnout (16.97%) was the lowest turnout since the first European election in 1979, yet the EU news coverage (11%) was higher than the average in the whole EU (9.8%) as well as the average amount of EU coverage in the new member states (10.4%). Such a result could imply that Slovak public does not pay attention to what the media say or that the people simply do not care about the EU and the election. Eurobarometer data from 2003 show that 33% of Slovaks as compared to 23% of Czechs pay "lot of attention to EU news" (Eurobarometer 2003.3). In the Czech Republic, the EU news coverage was half of the Slovak, but the turnout was more than ten percent higher than in Slovakia, yet still distant from the average EU turnout of 45.47%. The Pearson Chi-square test indicates that the results are statistically significant.

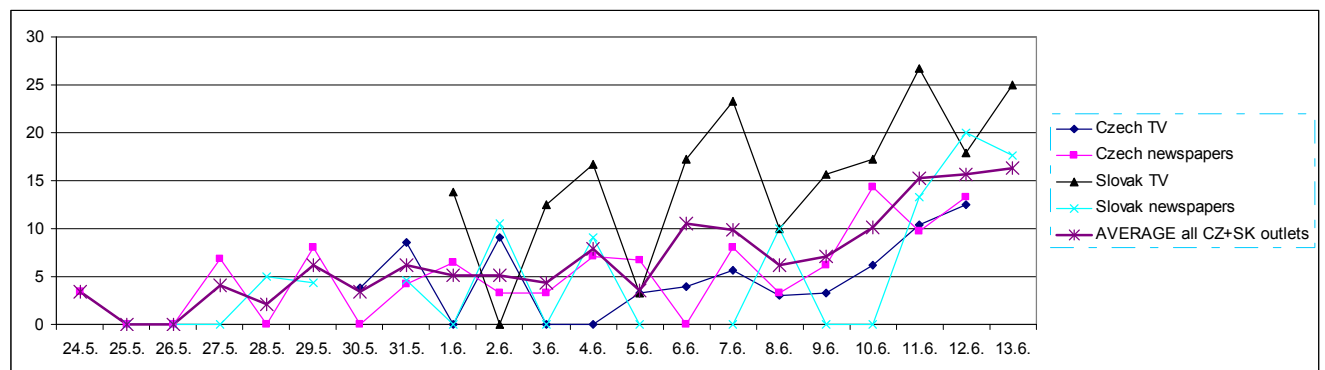
**Figure 3: VISIBILITY OF EU NEWS AND NEWS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN ELECTION (%)**: country comparison with relevance to the turnout at the European election

	Czech Republic	Slovakia
EU news	5,4	11
EP news	5,3	8,3
Turnout	28,32	16,97

\*Pearson Chi-square ,000 for the data on EU news and ,014 for the European election (EP) news

Figure 4 shows the change of EU news coverage in the three weeks (two weeks for television news) leading to the election and complies with previous research and observations that the EU coverage peaks around significant events. The coverage started at zero or at very low numbers in both countries at the beginning of the campaign and increased rapidly three days before the election took place. The highest coverage appeared in Slovak television on 11 June (26.67%; the European election took place on 13 June), while the highest coverage in the Czech Republic was in the Czech newspapers on 10 June (14.29%; the European election took place on 11 and 12 June). Czech media were more balanced compared to Slovakia in the amount of EU news they presented.

**Figure 4: VISIBILITY OF EU NEWS AND NEWS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN ELECTION (%)**: Change across the time in the two/three weeks leading to the election and comparison between Czech and Slovak television and newspapers



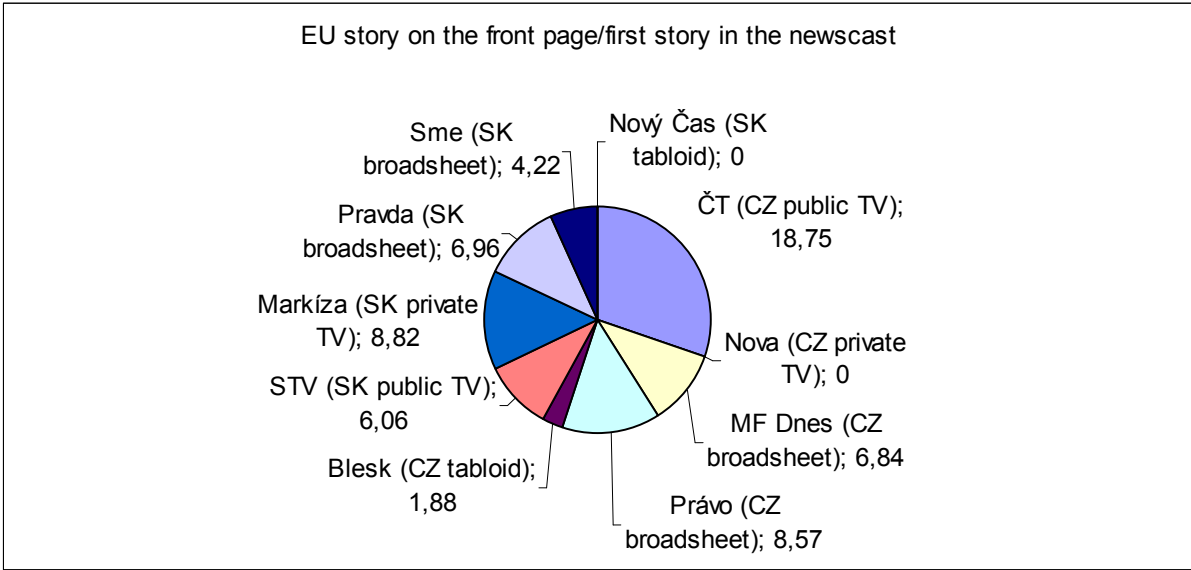
### PROMINENCE OF THE EU NEWS

The third research question asked how prominent EU news is and if this varies by outlet. The results of previous research showed that although the visibility of EU news was low, its prominence was relatively high. When examining television, results show the percentage of EU news that appeared as the first (or the second or the thirds) story in a newscast out of all EU news on television (see figure 6). The Czech public television (ČT) had the highest percentage of EU news as the first story of a newscast (18.75%) as compared

to Czech private television (*Nova*) that had no EU story as the first story. In Slovakia, the numbers for both public and private television were quite similar, 6.06% and 8.82%, respectively. The percentages of EU stories reported on the second and third place then varied (see figure 6).

The Czech public television put the most importance on EU stories also among all Czech and Slovak media, followed by Slovak private television (8.82%) and Czech broadsheet *Právo* (8.57% of EU stories placed on the front page). Both tabloids, Czech *Blesk* and Slovak *Nový Čas*, had the lowest numbers of EU storied placed on the front page (1.88% and 0%, respectively). The results disprove my hypothesis that newspapers put more importance on EU news than television. Moreover, these numbers do not indicate that EU news would be given any special prominence overall compared to other political news. However, as mentioned in the research design of this paper, more factors would need to be considered (such as the length of the EU stories or the amount of graphics accompanying the EU stories) to obtain more significant results.

**Figure 5: PROMINENCE OF EU NEWS (%): Comparison of individual outlets**



\* The numbers of the placement of the EU news on television signify how many (percent) of all EU news were on the first (second and third) place in the newscast. The numbers for newspapers mean the percentage of EU news that appeared on the front page out of all EU news.

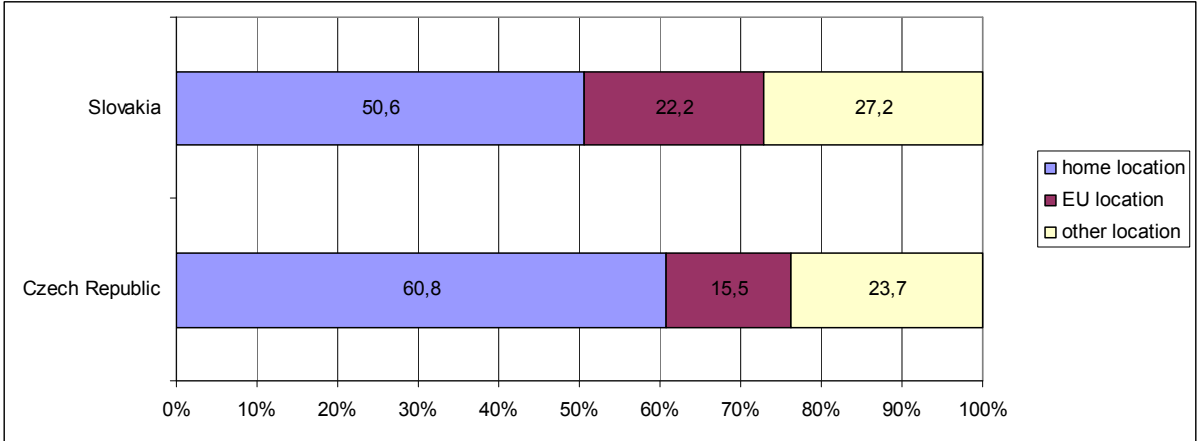
**Figure 6: PROMINENCE OF EU NEWS (%): The first three stories on television newscasts**

	ČT	Nova	STV	Markíza
EU story no.1	18,75	0	6,06	8,82
EU story no. 2	6,25	33,33	6,06	8,82
EU story no. 3	6,25	16,67	9,09	11,76

**EUROPEAN NATURE OF THE EU NEWS**

The research question four examines the European nature of the news first using the location of the story. As predicted, the majority of EU news was domestic: 60.8% of Czech EU news happened in the Czech Republic and 50.6% of Slovak EU news took place in Slovakia. Slovak media had slightly higher number of EU news from around other EU countries (22.2%) compared to the Czech media (15.5%). The fact that the Czech Republic and Slovakia had only joined the EU a few months before the election and thus held the election for the first time did not significantly increase the amount of EU news reported from other EU countries. According to the Pearson Chi-square test, these associations are statistically significant.

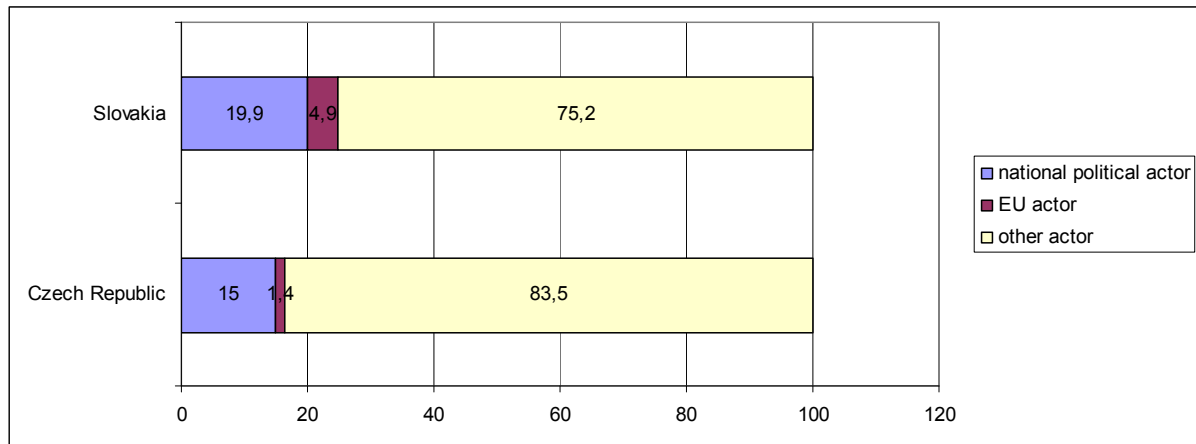
**Figure 7: LOCATION OF EU NEWS (%): Country comparison**



\* Pearson Chi-square ,000

The other variable used to evaluate the European nature of EU news coverage was actors. The majority of actors in both Czech and Slovak media were “other non-political actors,” such as representatives of public administration, businesses, or the public, presenting 83.5% of actors in the Czech EU news and 75.2% of actors in Slovak EU news (see figure 8). The EU actors took only 1.4% of all actors in the Czech EU news and 4.9% of all actors in the Slovak EU news. The Pearson Chi-square test signifies that the results are statistically significant.

**Figure 8: ACTORS IN THE EU NEWS (%): Country comparison**



\* Pearson Chi-square ,000

Similarly to previous studies and results in this paper, the highest number of EU actors was found in the EU news on public television (5.8%), and there were no EU-level actors in the tabloids (see figure 9). There was a difference in the percentage of EU actors in newspapers (1.5%) and on television (4.85%). In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, television is a more trusted source of information than the press, and more people watch television news every day than read newspapers every day (Eurobarometer). Therefore, these results show that the public should be receiving some substantial information about the EU actors, thus learning about the EU. According to the Pearson Chi-square test, these associations are statistically significant.

**Figure 9: ACTORS IN THE EU NEWS (%): Comparison of outlets**

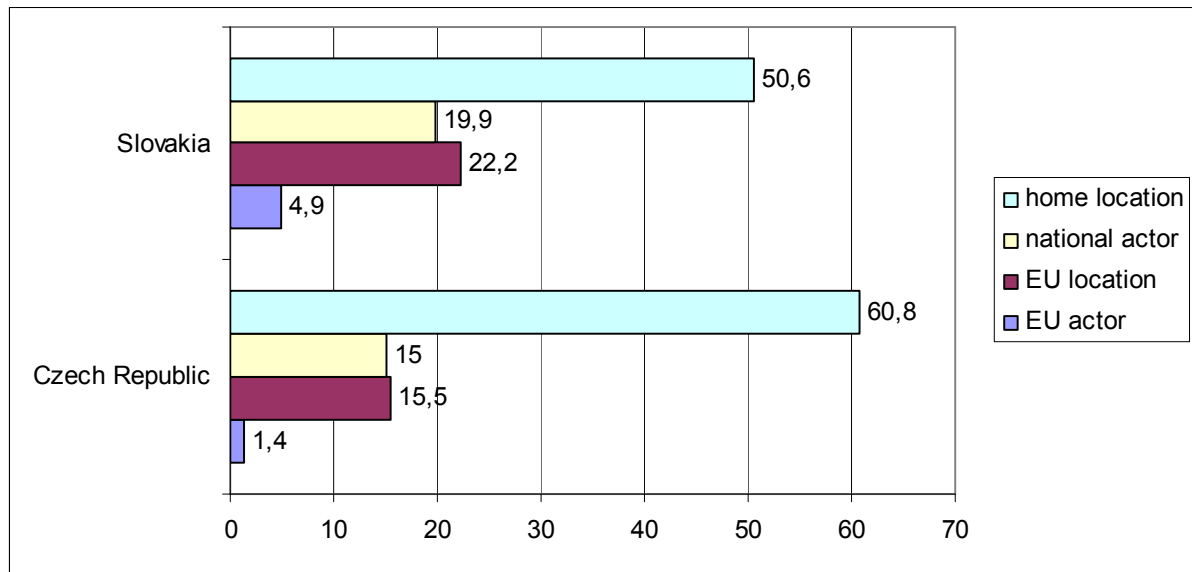
	Public TV	Private TV	Broadsheet	Tabloid
<b>National actor</b>	20,2	16,7	18,9	5,6
<b>EU actor</b>	5,8	3,9	1,5	0

\* Pearson Chi-square ,000

When we compare the two variables used to evaluate the EU nature of the news, there was much higher percentage of EU news that took place in an EU-location (18.85% average for the Czech Republic and Slovakia) than the number of EU-level actors (3.15% average for the Czech Republic and Slovakia; see figure 10). This corresponds with previous studies that found that EU news is often “faceless”. Overall, it could be observed and hypothesis confirmed that although the news was about the EU or the European election, it had rather national characteristics and involved national actors.



**Figure 10: EUROPEAN NATURE OF THE EU NEWS (%): Country comparison**



### **TONE OF THE EU NEWS**

The results for research question five about the tone of the EU coverage correspond with previous studies: the EU news was mostly neutral, yet relatively high percentage (48.6%) of the EU news evaluated the EU. Nevertheless, this number might have increased because this question combines both explicit and implicit evaluations. The EU news that evaluated the EU (explicitly) or had tendencies to evaluate it (implicitly) was mostly negative, on average 38.3% for all media in both countries. This is higher when compared to the average of all EU member states where only 16% of the news had some explicit evaluation (De Vreese et al. 2006: 493).

The Czech newspapers mentioned the EU in a positive way the most often, 13.9% of all EU news, while the Slovak newspapers were the least positive about the EU (6.1% of EU news with positive evaluations). These results are somewhat surprising because the Czech political elites are known to be rather eurosceptic or balancing both pro- and anti-EU views. The Czech and Slovak televisions are then both the most negative about the EU, with 49.7% and 43.8%, respectively, of EU news negatively evaluating the EU. The Pearson Chi-square test indicates that these associations are statistically significant.

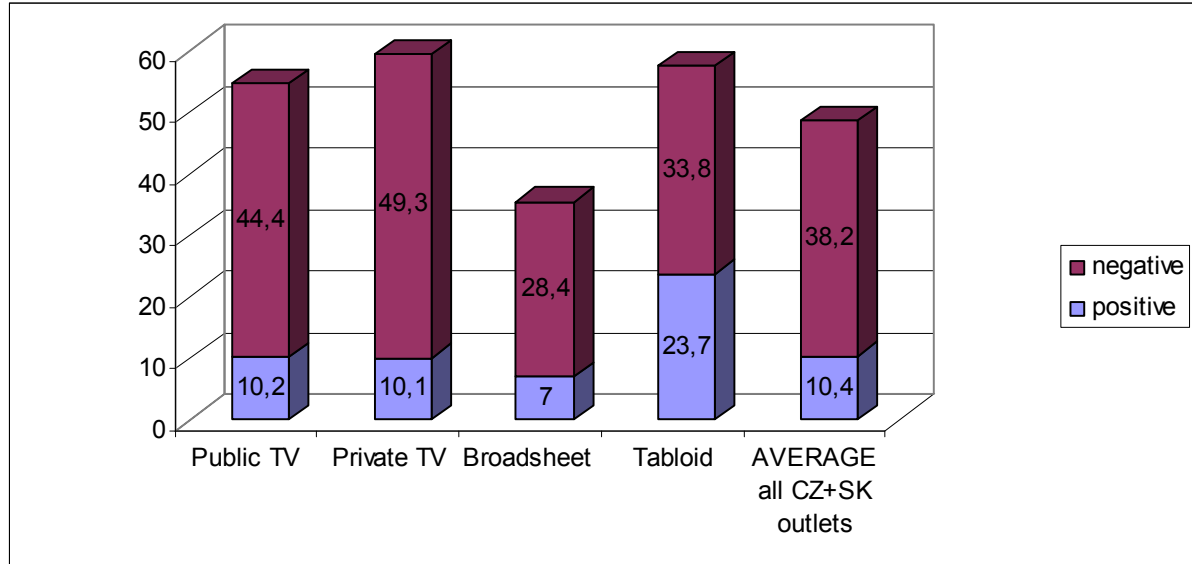
**Figure 11: EVALUATION OF THE EU IN THE EU NEWS (%): Comparison of country outlets**

	Czech TV	Czech newspapers	Slovak TV	Slovak newspapers	AVERAGE all CZ+SK outlets
<b>Positive</b>	9,3	13,9	11,1	6,1	10,4
<b>Negative</b>	49,7	30,3	43,8	28,7	38,2

\* Pearson Chi-square ,000

Tabloids in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia mentioned the EU in a positive way the most often (23.7% of EU news contain a positive reference to the EU or tendency to evaluate it positively; see figure 12). This finding is surprising considering the common knowledge that tabloids write sensational and negative news to attract the widest audience. The least positive about the EU were Czech and Slovak broadsheets. Tabloids generally showed the least evaluation of the EU (overall 35.4%, 28.4% of negative EU news) which contradicts previous findings for the reasons mentioned above. The private television in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia had the highest number of negative EU news, almost half of all EU stories reported (49.3%) contained negative evaluation or tendency. The Pearson Chi-square test shows that these associations are statistically significant.

**Figure 12: EVALUATION OF THE EU IN THE EU NEWS (%): Comparison of outlets**



\* Pearson Chi-square ,000

## CONCLUSION

The EU and its policies often seem very remote and complicated to the ordinary European citizens. They usually cannot experience or learn about the EU first-hand; therefore there is an enormous need for an effective political communication to give the public information about the EU and to ensure that the EU functions properly and legitimately. European citizens participate in the EU policy making by voting in the European election and delegating their countries' representatives to the EP. To make a sensible and educated decision and vote for a candidate that really represents voters' values and goals, the voters need to have enough substantial information about the candidate and the EU. The low and constantly decreasing turnout at the European election shows, however, that citizens mostly choose not to be a part of the European democratic process. Media can help the EU, European citizens and European political representatives to strengthen this democratic process by clear, regular and objective reporting on the EU, its processes and representatives. Research on the EU news coverage, as this study, is thus important because it shows to what extent the media actually fulfil their task and how much potential to influence the public opinion about the EU and the political situation in the EU they have.

This study compared the EU news coverage during the 2004 European election campaign in the two countries that share not only a border, but also a common history. In accordance with previous research, the study found that the visibility of EU news was generally low compared to other political news in the Czech and Slovak media but increased in the few days before the European election. The visibility and prominence of EU news was lower on private television than on public and lower in tabloids than in broadsheets. However, the visibility of EU news was higher on television than in newspapers which contradicts previous studies. This may be because television has a different, more prominent position among media in the Czech Republic and Slovakia than in the Western Europe. The tabloids were found to have the most positive evaluations of the EU among all Czech and Slovak outlets. The amount of EU stories containing negative evaluation of the EU on Czech and Slovak public televisions was high considering that the public television is usually viewed as the most objective medium concerning political news, but it could be explained by political influences and the opinionated journalistic traditions.

Based on the previous research, the EU news coverage should have been higher in the Czech Republic and Slovakia as the new member states when compared to the average EU coverage. However, the coverage in these two countries was lower than the EU average. This suggests that these two countries are different from the other new member states which needs

to be further examined using data from all new member states and comparing the results cross-nationally and across time. My next study looks into this issue. It examines the EU news coverage in eight post-Communist countries in the 2004 and 2009 European elections and analyses its impact on voter turnout. It argues that people exposed to media in which EU news coverage is highly visible, prominent, positive and EU-oriented are more likely to vote in the European elections, and that the contextual factors, such as political and economic situation or support for the EU, along with varying EU news coverage lead to the differences in turnout among countries and between the two elections.

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